



Toward Development of a Language Diversity Curricular Thread in K-12 Education

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Prepared for the International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation, Honolulu, Hawaii, February 2013



Observation

- Policy decisions affecting language communities happen all the time, sometimes in unexpected contexts
- Most of the general public has very little awareness of the value of language diversity
- Much of language advocacy involves educating decisionmakers

Question

Can we impact how our society as a whole values language diversity through simple touchpoints in school curriculum?

Approach

Identify curricular areas that have flexibility and context to touch on ideas of language diversity

➤ Foreign/world languages

Provide 2-5 lessons augmenting existing units of study to weave in age-appropriate mention of language diversity

- Indigenous communities
- Colonialism
- Language politics
- Arts (music, art, dance)
- Food

Pilot Environment

- K-8 laboratory school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Grades K-5 receive 15 minutes daily of Spanish immersion in the classroom
- Grades 6-8 receive 40 minutes daily
- 345 students, 22% multilingual

[If a whole village started speaking a language different from the one they used to] I would speak both because if the old one went away then it probably wouldn't come back.

— student, age 8

Languages are at most times connected to culture — student, age 10

Second grade implementation

Unit: Peru Sub-unit: Culture of the Sierra

Overarching idea: The geography of the region influences the culture
Language diversity connection: Indigenous culture has shaped the culture of the region and its impact continues to be felt today



- ✦ Students hypothesize how many languages are spoken in Peru; teacher introduces Quechua, Aymara, and Urarina
- ✦ Show images of Quechua people, clothing, etc; discuss Quechua words; guess whether words from a hat are Spanish/Quechua; notice present-day influence of Quechua words

- ✦ Interpretive reading task about the region
- ✦ Review and discussion — how do students understand the meaning of new words?



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Fourth grade implementation

Unit: Spanish Art Sub-unit: Guernica and the Spanish Civil War

Overarching idea: Art is often a reflection of the events that are currently occurring in the world around us.

Language diversity connection: Language rights were restricted under Franco and the impact persists today



- ✦ Guernica: images and vocabulary
- ✦ Spanish Civil War: comparing Nationalists and Spanish Republic
- ✦ Franco's rule: impacts on culture
- ✦ Geography: language distribution (Catalan, Galician, Castilian, Basque)
- ✦ Role-playing: what would a dual-language classroom feel like?
- ✦ Discussion: How would you feel if your language were banned?
- ✦ Guernica: interpretive reading
- ✦ Review



Guernica (oil on canvas) by Pablo Picasso, 1937

There can be things inexpressible in the same amount of words — student, age 9

Languages have been lost because countries stop speaking them and they are like cultures so you don't want to lose them. — student, age 9

If my friend chose to speak the old language and I chose to speak the new language we couldn't speak to each other. — student, age 7

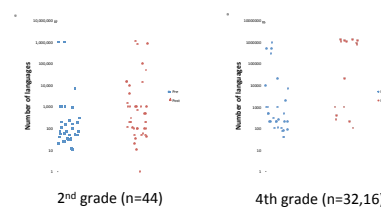
Methodology

1. Pre-survey of 2nd and 4th grade students to assess their awareness of language diversity
 - 2nd grade: group interview
 - 4th grade: written survey
2. Implementation of sub-units
 - 4-6 days
 - No explicit mention of the number of languages in the world is made
3. Post-survey to capture any change in attitude, focusing on two questions
 1. How many languages do you think there are in the world?
 2. Is it important to have a lot of different languages in the world?

Survey and implementation were executed with no mention of each other by two different instructors

Results

Change in children's estimates of the number of languages in the world



Future Directions

- Extend the language diversity thread throughout 1-5
- Explore similar segments in 6-8
- Make sample units available for dissemination
- Assess impact in demographically diverse schools

The authors gratefully acknowledge the students and teachers of Falk School, whose flexibility and interest made this project possible.